



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: May 1 to June 30, 2005

**LEBANON: Voter Education (05870)
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-01-00004-00**

Project dates: May 1, 2005 to October 31, 2005

Total budget: \$170,000.00 Total spent to date: \$106,175.82

I. SUMMARY

Unable to form a national unity government, Prime Minister Omar Karami resigned on April 13, 2005 and was replaced by moderate pro-Syrian businessman Najib Mikati. Mikati immediately named a 14-member non-parliamentarian government to oversee the country in the run-up to legislative elections and set a May 29 start date for the elections. Over the course of four consecutive Sundays, voters went to the polls for the first time absent the presence of Syrian troops in more than three decades.

A number of factors have contributed to historically low voter confidence in election processes in Lebanon including: the redrafting of the electoral law at each election; the continued dominance of partisan media at election time; and the absence of an independent body to manage elections. While reform has been slow in coming, civil society organizations, such as the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), *Sho'oon Jenoubia* (Southern Issues) and the Lebanese Women's Network (LWN) have made incremental gains in recent years. Specifically, LADE has, over time, gained substantial credibility as an independent election monitoring organization and as a non partisan voice in a much divided society.

Building on its current domestic election monitoring program supported by the U.S. Department of State's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) proposes to conduct a six-month program to promote citizen participation through voter education and advocacy for electoral reforms. NDI is working to achieve the following objective:

- Strengthen the capacity of local institutions to build voter and civic awareness on electoral issues and develop constituencies for electoral reform.
- During this reporting period, NDI conducted the following activities:

- Organized focus groups in partnership with the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) and Charney Research to gauge the views and expectations of voters on political and electoral reforms and help political parties to define strategies and messages prior to the parliamentary elections;
- Assisted the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) conduct a national “get-out-the-vote” voter education campaign targeting young and female Lebanese voters through TV and radio spots, posters, and brochures; and
- Assisted in the publication and distribution of 5,000 copies of a special edition of *Sho’oon Jenoubia* magazine focusing on legislative elections and electoral reform.

II. BACKGROUND

Unable to form a national unity government to oversee the country in the run-up to legislative elections, Prime Minister Omar Karami resigned on April 13, 2005. Two days later, President Emile Lahoud appointed moderate pro-Syrian businessman Najib Mikati prime minister. Mikati quickly formed a 14-member non-parliamentarian cabinet to oversee the country in the run-up to legislative elections, ending two months of political deadlock during which Lebanon was left without a government. Mikati’s government set a May 29 start date for elections, which were scheduled take place over four consecutive Sundays, and parliament voted to extend its mandate through the end of the election cycle. Unable to reach a consensus on a new electoral framework, the government defaulted to the use of the 2000 electoral law, leaving many parties dissatisfied, but allowing for elections to be held without delay.

As a result of the 2005 legislative elections, an opposition alliance led by Saad Hariri, the son of late former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Democratic Gathering, won a majority of seats in parliament. The Hariri-Jumblatt alliance claimed 72 of the 128 contested seats in the first elections held in the aftermath of Syria’s withdrawal, ending nearly two decades of legislative control by pro-Syrian politicians. Meanwhile, an alliance between Lebanon’s two largest Shia groups, Hezbollah and Amal Movement, won 35 seats, mainly in the predominantly Shia-populated South. Candidate lists run in the largely Christian Mount Lebanon region by former anti-Syrian Army General Michel Aoun, who recently returned to Lebanon on May 7 after fifteen years in exile, claimed the remaining 21 seats.

Following the elections, Prime Minister Mikati and his caretaker government stepped down and President Lahoud appointed former finance minister Fuad Siniora as the new prime minister. Siniora received the support of 126 of 128 members of parliament to preside over the first Lebanese Cabinet to take office without the presence of Syrian troops in three decades. Meanwhile, Amal Movement leader Nabih Berri was re-elected as parliamentary speaker for a fourth consecutive term. Berri received the support of 90 legislators to retain the speaker’s post, which is the highest position reserved for a Shi’ite under the constitution. The new Lebanese government and parliament will be responsible for introducing and implementing a number of reform initiatives, including a new electoral framework, measures aimed at ending corruption, improving the economy, and restructuring the country’s security system.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

During this reporting period, NDI conducted the following activities:

- Organized focus groups in partnership with the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) and Charney Research to gauge the views and expectations of voters on political and electoral reforms and help political parties to define strategies and messages prior to the parliamentary elections;
- Assisted the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) conduct a national “get-out-the-vote” voter education campaign targeting young and female Lebanese voters through TV and radio spots, posters, and brochures; and
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Focus Group Research

In partnership with the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) and Charney Research, NDI organized a series of nine focus groups from May 10 to 13 to examine attitudes of the country’s various communities based on geographic regions, age, gender, and major confessional groupings. NDI also enlisted the help of Ipsos-Stat, a global marketing firm with an office in Lebanon, to help recruit and transport participants to the focus group center in Beirut. NDI, LCPS and Charney Research developed a questionnaire and discussion guide that addressed the following topics:

- Voter mood in the pre-election period
- Voter feelings about prominent political figures
- Voter education and awareness
- Sensitivity to women and youth leadership in politics
- Political tolerance
- Hopes for the future.

The focus groups included undecided voters from all regions, confessional groups and demographics in Lebanon.

Craig Charney, Director of Charney Research, traveled to Beirut from May 7 to 15 to coordinate with NDI and LCPS on the focus groups, as well as train and oversee the facilitators. Charney also produced a final report, based on direct transcripts, detailing the findings of the focus groups¹. The focus groups revealed:

- General discontent with the 2000 election law
- Dissatisfaction with the confessional leadership
- Doubtful turnout at the polls
- General desire for meaningful political reforms.

¹ The Executive Summary is attached.

Most notably, the findings indicated that voter education could play an important role in the elections by informing voters about their voting rights and the need to procure and present a voter card at the polls. Participant reactions revealed that awareness of women's problems was relatively low – even among women. NDI shared this information with LADE so the organization could develop a substantive and informative national “get-out-the-vote” campaign.

On the eve of the first round of elections, NDI Senior Advisor Joseph Hall presented a synopsis of the focus group findings to US Senators John McCain, John Sununu, and Lindsey Graham during a briefing at the US Embassy in Beirut and Lebanese daily *An-Nahar* published a half-page synopsis of the findings in its June 5 edition.

Voter Education Campaign

With NDI's assistance, LADE conducted a national “get-out-the-vote” media campaign targeting young and female Lebanese voters with the goal of increasing voter awareness. LADE, together with Quantum Communications, produced television and radio spots, as well as bus and billboard advertisements featuring the messages “No Card, No Vote” to remind voters to procure their registration cards before election day, and “Use Your Voice” to promote women's participation in the electoral process.

The “No Card, No Vote” message appeared on 675 billboards throughout the country. These billboards were regionally staggered in accordance with the voter card application deadline of each district. The campaign was also waged on the back of 18 buses over a period of three weeks in the South and Mount Lebanon regions. The campaign also ran extensively on eight radio stations for ten days. NDI assisted LADE to distribute 49,000 voter card campaign flyers to political parties, candidates and the general public.

The “Use Your Voice” campaign featured five prominent Lebanese women appearing in television, radio and billboard advertisements. The campaign ran on television and radio for one week and was featured on 600 billboards throughout the election cycle. NDI coordinated the distribution of 25,000 “Use Your Voice” bumper stickers throughout the country.



Billboard featuring LADE's “No Card, No Vote” media campaign message



A LADE “Use Your Voice” billboard featuring Al-Arabiyya anchorwoman Giselle Khoury

Sho’oon Jenoubia Elections Edition

With NDI’s assistance, *Sho’oon Jenoubia* (Southern Issues) magazine published and distributed 5,000 copies of a special edition focusing on legislative elections and electoral reform. Topics addressed in the magazine include:

- The importance of free and fair elections
- Voting rights under the law
- Comparisons of different political systems
- The role of civic organizations in the elections process
- Election monitoring
- Campaign planning
- Effective citizen participation in elections
- The need for political reform

The 42-page special edition also included three pages of advertisements from LADE’s “get-out-the-vote” campaign, including the advertisement above.

IV. RESULTS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Objective: To strengthen the capacity of Lebanese civil society organizations to build civic awareness on electoral issues and develop constituencies for electoral reform.

- Through focus group sessions, NDI and LCPS were able to gauge citizens’ views and expectations on the political situation and produce a findings report in advance of legislative elections.
- NDI and LCPS shared the findings of the focus groups with civic organizations, members of the media and the international community through reports and briefings. Results that pointed to gaps in voter education proved especially useful when developing LADE’s media campaigns. The full focus group report, “**The Country of Doubt: Lebanon**

Between the Independence Intifada and the Parliamentary Elections” can be found in both English and Arabic on the LCPS website: www.lcps-lebanon.org.

- LADE’s voter education campaign enabled the organization and other partner organizations to inform their constituencies - especially young and female voters - on the importance of political and civic participation campaign via a national media campaign.
- Through the publication and distribution of a special elections edition, *Sho’oon Jenoubia* magazine was able to inform citizens about a number of important issues relevant to the electoral process in advance of legislative elections.

V. EVALUATION

In Lebanon’s fluid, highly volatile political climate, quantitative research has flagged changes in public opinion, but there has been a lack of in-depth qualitative research on voter concerns and attitudes. The final focus group report highlights uncertainty about the country’s future in the wake of Syria’s withdrawal, discontent with the election law, dissatisfaction with confessional leadership, doubtful turnout at the polls, and a general desire for change. The findings also indicated that voter education could play an important role in the elections by informing voters about their voting rights and the need to procure and present a voter card at the polls. Participant reactions revealed that awareness of women’s problems was relatively low – even among women. NDI shared this information with LADE so the organization could develop a substantive and informative national “get-out-the-vote” campaign.

NDI and LCPS released an overview of the focus group findings in advance of elections. Due to the time constraints of the funding cycle, the full report was not available to the general public until one week into the elections. Through these focus groups, NDI and LCPS examined mutual capacities and local demand to develop an independent focus group center in Lebanon. This was the first step in a long-term collaboration between both groups.

While it is difficult in a heated electoral climate to gauge what direct impact LADE’s voter education campaign had on overall voter turnout, the advertisements were highly visible and were displayed in both urban and rural areas through multiple forms of media. During the observation mission, LADE found that a low number of voters attempted to vote without voter cards. LADE’s final elections observation report due out in mid-August will release more information on this issue.

The special elections edition of *Sho’oon Jenoubia* reinforced other voter education and “get-out-the vote” efforts through in-depth articles and electoral advertisements. In general, voter turnout varied from round to round in function of the amount of competition among candidates and lists.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

In the next quarter, LADE, in coordination with NDI, plans to release a final report evaluating the electoral process and the impact of its two voter education campaigns. The report will be shared with political parties and civic organizations, USAID, MEPI and possibly the media.

Appendix

“The Country of Doubt:” Lebanon Between the Independence Intifada and the Parliamentary Elections

Craig Charney

Focus Group Report
May, 2005

Lebanese Center for Policy Studies
National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon, poised between the momentous days of the Independence Intifada of February and March 2005 and the parliamentary elections of May and June, is passing through a time of great possibility and great uncertainty. The mass mobilizations that followed the February 14 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, which forced the government of Prime Minister Omar Karame to resign and the Syrian troops who had been present for three decades to withdraw, were historic events that galvanized the nation and spurred hope for change and democracy, particularly among the young. Yet in recent weeks, as quarrels among opposition politicians have occupied the foreground while the economy has deteriorated and a series of bombs have exploded, concern has spread that politics-as-usual was returning and that the momentum for change might be dissipating.

Although Lebanon’s civil war ended 15 years ago, with the signature of the Ta’if accords of 1989, the country is only now beginning to face the whole spectrum of post-conflict issues which confront it. Under Syrian tutelage, Lebanese politics after the war were in a deep freeze. The old system of religious-confessional patronage that dominated Lebanese politics before the war was given new life by reconstruction efforts, but the strings were pulled from Damascus and the fundamental issues were not addressed. While impressive progress was made in the physical reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country, particularly in Beirut, Lebanon’s democratic system was not fully functioning and its weak institutions and fragmented political culture were not reformed to address the deeper issues posed by the divisive 14-year civil conflict. Only after the retreat of Syrian troops and the pervasive security apparatus associated with them could these issues be confronted. The first national elections after their departure will be a watershed in this process of change. In a very real sense, the postwar era in Lebanese politics is only beginning now.

To help illuminate the processes of change underway and facilitate the development of appropriate voter education and election monitoring programs, we conducted 10 focus groups in Beirut from May 10 to 13 for the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. The groups included, separately, Lebanese citizens

of all regions (Beirut, Mt. Lebanon, North Lebanon, South Lebanon, and Bekaa), the principal religious groups (Maronite, Sunni, Shia, and Druze), both sexes, and 21-35 year olds and people over 35. They explored topics related to the country's political situation, the upcoming elections, voter education needs, and issues concerning tolerance, women, and youth. This report presents what we learned.

Key findings of the study include:

- The hopes and pride inspired by the Independence Intifada are still present, especially among the young, but economic and political uncertainty dominate the public mood.
- High hopes were invested in the transitional government but it is seen as delivering little.
- The Syrian withdrawal is universally welcomed, although some feel its manner was undignified.
- Lebanese feel alienated from most of their leaders, including President Emile Lahoud.
- Public concerns focus on the economy, education, health care, and for the young, social activities.
- People are sick of the old leaders and the confessional patronage politics they symbolize.
- There is a new desire for de-confessionalized politics and even real political parties, not factions, which was triggered by Hariri's death.
- Michel Aoun, who returned from exile to cross-confessional support, now personifies the aspiration for strong, non-sectarian government.
- Hezbollah's eventual role is seen as that of a political party, though there is argument over when it should make this change.
- Anti-confessionalism does not mean the end of religious parliamentary seats or the ban on civil marriage, but rather a new collective identity based on national, not group interest.
- There are hopes that the coming elections will be cleaner than in the past due to the lack of a Syrian presence and election observers, but concerns about the persistence of the 2000 election law, vote buying, and cheating in the count could discourage participation.
- Hopes for change may encourage young voters who have not previously participated to vote.
- Voter education can play a useful role by encouraging the use of voting curtains to impede vote buying, informing voters about election observation, and teaching about obtaining voter cards.
- Awareness of women's problems as a group was relatively low, even among women, but there was substantial support for a quota to boost women's parliamentary representation.
- There was considerable division on the 18-year-old vote, with the young more favorable.
- Awareness of Lebanon's international economic position was very limited. Many Lebanese think Syria is economically better off than they are; few are aware of the economic reforms and challenges the country faces as it seeks to regain its place in the region's economy.